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ABSTRACT

The role of the principal as the instructional leader is particularly important in special education because the principal's attitude toward special-education students, as well as his or her ability, or inability, to supervise their instruction, will ultimately determine the efficacy of the school's special-education services. Moreover, the delivery of special-education services, far more than general-education services, presents school divisions with a substantial risk of legal liability. Nevertheless, preservice administrators are not being adequately prepared to supervise the instructional methodologies of special educators. The following steps are recommended to address this problem: (1) preservice administrators should be required to complete coursework in special educational instructional methodologies; (2) inservice training similar to preservice training should also be provided to current site-based administrators; (3) instructional specialists should be incorporated in the supervisory program; and (4) quality in special education instruction needs to be emphasized. (Contains 6 pages of references.) (DFR)

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Supervising Special Education Instruction: Does It Deserve A Special Place In Administrative Preparatory Programs?

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Abstract

The delivery of special education services, far more than general education services, presents school divisions with a substantial risk of legal liability. Yet, pre-service administrators are not being adequately prepared to supervise the instructional methodologies of special educators. To address that, the following steps are recommended: first, require preservice administrators to complete coursework in special education instructional methodologies; second, provide similar inservice training to current site-based administrators; third, incorporate instructional specialists into the supervisory program; and finally, emphasize quality in special education instruction.

Introduction

The ability of a principal to serve as his or her school's instructional leader is a one of the most significant determinants of an individual school's effectiveness (Algozzinne, Ysseldyke & Campbell, 1994; Goor, Schwenn & Boyer, 1997; Kirner, Vatour & Vatour, 1993). Regardless of whether it is in special education, or general education, "...the principal is the instructional leader for all programs within the school" (Goor, et al., 1997, p. 133). Goor, et al. (1997) added, however, that the role of the principal as the instructional leader is particularly important in special education; because the principal's attitude toward special education students, as well as his ability (or inability) to supervise their instruction, will ultimately determine the efficacy of the school's special education services (see also Burrello, Schrup & Barnett, 1992; Van Horn, Burrello & DeClue, 1992; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Yet, many building level administrators may lack the prepartion necessary to directly supervise the instructional practices of the special education teachers on their staffs (Breton & Donaldson, 1991; Goor et al., 1997; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994).

Given that, the goals of this paper are: to identify and examine the potential issues surrounding the instructional supervision of special education teachers by building level administrators; and to offer several recommendations to improve the situation. To that end, this paper includes a discussion of how, in general, school administrators are trained to supervise

their faculties. Following that is an examination of how special education teachers are trained to carry out their duties; and how, if at all, special education practices differ from those of general education. Then, after considering both the administrative and instructional sides of the educational coin, several recommendations will be offered to help ensure a truly beneficial supervisory experience. But, first, let us consider how, in general, prospective administrators are trained to supervise their faculties.

Becoming and Instructional Supervisor

According to Behar-Horenstein and Ornstein (1996), "...principals for the 21st century will need to be able to cope with change processes and challenges associated with educating diverse student populations..." (p. 18). That said, the purpose of this section is to provide a modest review of the current trends in the instructional supervision process as they relate to the training of prospective administrators. As a result, our goal is to identify the current philosophical positions that are influencing the training of licensed instructional supervisors.

Sullivan and Glanz (2000) identified seven methods of instructional supervision that have evolved since the inception of public schools in America. In particular, they note that clinical supervision (see Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer, 1969; Hill, 1968), with it's emphasis on collegiality and collaboration, dominated the 1970's and 1980's (p. 18); and that the "Changing Concepts" model of supervision (see pp. 11 & 20) emerged in the

early 1990's. But, what, exactly, is the "Changing Concepts" model?

According to Sullivan and Glanz (2000), it involves the, "...the dissolution of autocratic administrative practices where overbearing supervisors rule by fiat" (p. 20); which essentially means that teachers should be given more responsibility in the supervision process. To support their claim that this movement began in the 1990's, they point to the introduction of methods such as teacher empowerment (e.g. Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993), peer supervision (e.g. Willerman, McNeely & Koffman, 1991) and cognitive coaching (e.g. Costa and Garmston, 1994). Basically, in the Changing Concepts model, instructional supervision is the responsibility of all professional educators (e.g. Sergiovanni, 1992). But, does that mean that the principal should be completely excluded from the process? Of course not.

Granted, as professionals, teachers should have a voice in their own supervision. But, as noted in the introduction, the influence of the principal in the instructional process is significant, particularly in the delivery of special education services (Burrello, et al., 1992; Goor, et al., 1997; Van Horn, et al., 1992; Sirotnik, et al., 1994; Valesky, et al., 1992). But, what is so special about special education?

Differences Between Special Education and General Education

Most anyone that has ever worked in a school that receives federal funds recognizes that special education and general education are, in many respects, quite different in both their mission and procedures. For example, the use of standardized

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assessment tools to determine the individual needs of a specific student, and the design of an individual education program, sets the special education process apart from the national standards movement; which seeks to ensure the same education for every student. Moreover, an additional discrepancy (typically) between the two exists in the setting in which instruction is delivered (Boone & Avila, 1992).

Boone and Avila (1992) suggest that special educators perform multiple roles; whereas most general educators are allowed to focus almost entirely upon the instruction of their students. To that end, they state that tasks like "...record keeping, referring students for evaluation, implementing diagnostic procedures, observing stringent due process requirements and functioning as a member of a team of specialists..." (p. 89), differentiate special educators from general educators. Be that as it may, however, they then add that, "Although very real, differences between regular and special education settings must never obscure the purpose that brings the principal into the classroom: assessing the quality of special education instruction" (p. 89). Unfortunately, however, with regard to instruction and supervision, they seem to have disregarded the differences between special and general education.

For example, on page ninety, Boone and Avila (1992) state that, "Students are students." They then add that, "The same behaviors that mark effective teaching in the regular classroom also indicate effective teaching in the special education

classroom" (p. 91). Although, to a certain extent, those statements may be true, we take issue with them; because if, as Boone and Avila (1992) appear to suggest, general educators already possess the necessary skills (teaching methods) to meet the needs of their disabled students, why, then, do we need specialists, who have been specially trained and licensed to administer specialized instruction to the disabled, in the schools? Indeed, it appears as though Boone and Avila (1992) believe that what makes special education special is the fact that it usually takes place in a small group setting. But, is that accurate?

Fuchs and Fuchs (1995) offer that at least two, specific, features differentiate a special educator's approach to instruction from the efforts of their general education counterparts. Specifically, they are "...the use of empirically validated procedures and an intensive, data based focus on individual students" (p. 527). To that end, research suggests that specialized instructional methods, such as applied behavior analysis (Birnie-Selwyn & Guerin, 1997; Olympia, Sheridan, Jenson & Andrews, 1994), task analysis (Bateman, 1971; Hallahan, Kauffman & Lloyd, 1999), direct instruction (Brophy & Good, 1986; Engelmann, 1997; Hallahan, Kauffman & Lloyd, 1999; Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986), cognitive-behavior modification (Meichenbaum, 1977), and mnemonic instruction (Brigham, Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1995; Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1992) have proven to be highly effective with special needs learners. Unfortunately, such techniques are rarely incorporated into the course work of

preservice general educators. Moreover, Fuchs and Fuchs (1995) found that many inservice general educators were reluctant to alter their instructional practices based upon the individual needs of the special education students in their classrooms.

Given those findings, therefore, while small group instruction may be an integral component of the special education process, it is by no means the single determinant of success. Indeed, if they are to help their students succeed, special educators cannot afford the luxury of learning, and applying, only one method of instruction (e.g. whole language) as many general educators are trained to do. Instead, they must be able, and willing, to apply a wide variety of instructional techniques that have been empirically proven to work with whatever disability type(s) the student may display. To that end, Meyen, Vergason and Whelan (1996), add that all instructional efforts "...should be determined not by what is popular, but by what is tested, evaluated, and proven to be effective for all students..." (p. 31). That is especially so when working with children who have identified difficulties with learning.

As a result, school administrators, who directly supervise the instruction of special education teachers, must also, as professionals, be able to clinically evaluate the varied instructional practices of the specialists on their faculties to ensure that best practice methodologies are being employed. But, is the average administrator, fresh from an administrative licensure program, adequately prepared to perform that task?

Unfortunately, it appears that, in too many cases, the answer is "No."

Training Administrators to Supervise Special Educators

According to Breton and Donaldson (1991), many school administrators "...report that they have received very little, if any, training in supervising resource teachers and that they feel inadequate in the performance of that task" (see also Davis, 1978; Moya and Glenda, 1982). Then, three years later, Sirotnik and Kimball (1994) added that "...Special education (and its relationship to general education) is treated wholly inadequately, if at all, in programs designed to prepare school administrators" (p. 599).

To make their point, Sirotnik and Kimball (1994) examined the initial report produced by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1990) entitled Principals for Our Changing Schools: Preparation and Certification, which identified twenty-one specific skill areas pursuant to the principalship; as well as the Board's 1993 publication, Principals for Our Changing Schools: Knowledge and Skill Base, which further examined "...the substance of each of these domains" (p. 600). Through that process, Sirotnik, et al. (1994) found that, other than cursory attention to the legal aspects of special education, the education of the handicapped (methods of instruction, etc.) received scant attention in the vast majority of administrative licensure programs. For example, in Direct Teaching Tactics for Exceptional Children: A Practice and Supervision Guide, Stowitschek, Stowitschek, Hendrickson and Day (1984) contend

that, "...direct teaching approaches show the greatest promise for solving instruction problems, and an increased emphasis in teacher education must be placed on guarantying the acquisition and demonstration of direct teaching competence by teachers" (p. vii). But, what, exactly, is direct instruction, and why does defining it matter to the supervision process?

Defining Direct Instruction

Hallahan, Kauffman and Lloyd (1999) concisely defined the two types of direct instruction (specifically direct instruction [d.i.], the generic term for teacher led instruction, and Direct Instruction [D.I.], the name given to an explicit set of tracking strategies). In both, structured lessons are presented that: present new information in small doses, with frequent questioning, to small groups, with opportunities for extensive practice as well as feedback, reinforcement and correction (see page 67). In D.I., however, Hallahan, et al. (1999) argue that the Theory of Instruction, as identified by Engelmann & Carnine (1982), influences the goal of the instruction; because, students are taught (through multiple experiences in a controlled environment) to apply learned practices to new situations in order to solve unfamiliar problems outside of their practice environment. That said, it is essential that instructional supervisors (vis a vis building administrators) understand the similarities and differences between d.i. and D.I., as well as understand the end goal of the lesson before they observe it, if they are to be expected to effectively evaluate the instruction. Moreover, we specifically chose to examine the concept of direct

instruction because it is frequently referred to by many administrators who may, in fact, not understand what direct instruction actually is; which could adversely affect their ability to provide sound, professional, instructional support to the special educators on their faculties.

Improving the Supervision Process

According to Billingsley and Jones (1993), "Failure to provide adequate supervision prevents systems from creating conditions necessary for building strong instructional programs" (p. 3). Moreover, Fimian (1986) concluded that the inferior supervision of special educators is directly related to the attrition of such specialists in schools. What, therefore, can be done to address the apparent inability of many building level supervisors (principals and assistant principals) to supervise the special education instructional practices that take place within their buildings? We offer that four general steps should be taken.

Additional preservice training of administrators in special education. According to Patterson, Marshall & Bowling (2000), "Only five states have special education requirements for administrator certification" (p. 17). To that end, Tryneski (1996-1997) found that in Florida, administrative candidates have the option of completing a six hour emphasis in a specified area, and special education is one of the choices (p. 29). Alabama, on the other hand, requires a three hour generalized course in the special education; but, only, "..if not completed for another certification" (p. 12). In comparison, Idaho (p. 71), Missouri

(p. 134), and Maine (p. 111) each require that prospective administrators have a basic level of competence in special education and it's related issues. Granted, those five states should be applauded for recognizing the need their step in the right direction. But, forty-five other states still have no requirements principals. That could foreshadow very negative repercussions for school systems who's principals are encouraged to employ site-based management of their particular school's special education programs without sufficient training to support their decisions.

Inservice training for current administrators. Patterson, et al. (2000) stated that, "Principals must participate in ongoing education regarding the changes and trends in the field of special education...," which, in turn, will effect the principal's opinions about special education instruction; because, "...the principal's actions are the most important indicator of his or her beliefs" (p. 19). This step is also crucial because opinions about the efficacy of different instructional methodologies, whether empirically proven or not, are often produced by an instructional bandwagon mentality; and it is, "A primary responsibility of educators...to minimize the contribution of poor teaching to learning disabilities" (Hallahan, Kauffman & Lloyd, 1997, p. 6). To that same end, Kauffman (1994) concluded that, "Special education carries special responsibility for care in teaching or it has no meaning, regardless of where or by whom it is offered" (p. 616-617).

Incorporating other specialists into the supervisory process. Osborne, DiMattia and Curran (1993) stress the need for the incorporation of multiple professionals into the supervision process as it applies to special education teachers; because of the awkward position in which their job places them. Specifically, they stated that, "Special education practitioners are sometimes confused over who their immediate supervisor is. As members of the special education department, they come under the auspices of the special education administrator. As members of the faculty of the building that their program is located in, they fall within the supervisory domain of the building principal" (p. 41).

To that end, Osborne, et al. (1993) suggested that, with regard to the supervision of special educators, the task be shared by both the principals and the/a special education administrator. Specifically, they contend that the principal is in the best position to evaluate the teacher's ability to meet the needs (daily) of their students, and their ability to interact with other teachers. But, since special educators often employ instructional methodologies that are significantly different from those of the general education staff (which the principal is accustomed to supervising), the special education administrator is in a better position to evaluate the efficacy of their instruction (see p. 44). Such shared responsibility may, however, inadvertently create a negative situation.

For example, will the school's secretary transfer a phone call from a parent, who is upset about how their disabled child

is being taught, to the special education director in the central office; or to the school's principal (the defacto representative of the central office) who is already on-site? In such instances, it does not seem far-fetched to assume that the principal will be the one who is expected to handle such situations. As a result, we believe that the principal should be the primary, instructional supervisor of his or her entire staff (including the special educators). Doing so, however, requires that principals attain, and maintain, a significant level of understanding about the methods, and processes, of special education instruction.

When observing, focus on quality not quantity. In 1997, Coladarci and Breton concluded that, among a group of Maine resource room teachers, the perceived utility of the instructional supervision that they received, rather than it's frequency, was significantly related to a higher sense of teacher efficacy. That theme also emerged in Kaufman and Walker (1993), who found that a percieved greater interest in program appearance, rather than quality of instruction, was ranked fourth (out of thirty-four irritating behaviors exhibited by school administrators) by special educators. Administrators must, therefore, be cogniscent of the atmosphere that their supervisory actions, and inactions, create within their faculties.

Conclusion

If we accept the notion that principals are their schools' instructional leaders, we must not exclude special education from that system. Unfortunately, our findings support the notion that

many administrative preparatory programs have done just that. As previously noted, at present, only five states have modified their administrative licensure requirements to include a specific (albeit basic) knowledge of special education practices; and in one of those five (Florida), special education is only one of a host of options that a prospective administrator may choose to study.

Indeed, special education, far more than general education, presents principals with their greatest risk of legal liability. As a result, building level administrators must possess, and maintain through inservice training, a thorough understanding of both special education law and the empirically validated instructional methodologies that special educators are trained to employ. That is especially true in school divisions that apply a site-based management system in which each principal is encouraged to design (within the law and division policy), and supervise, her school's instructional delivery systems. Failure to ensure that principals are able to identify best practice methods when they see them, as well as when they do not, ensures that the quality of instruction that every child receives is left to chance; and that is unacceptable.

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